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Space 'Peeping Toms' Are a Danger

Long before President Reagan brought up the subject of "Star Wars," the militarization of space had begun. Both the United States and Soviet Union have been keeping a military watch on one another for years through spy satellites high in space.

But few Americans realize just what these orbiting Peeping Toms are capable of and how big a threat they would be in a conflict. My associate Dale Van Atta has obtained a secret General Accounting Office report that gives the Pentagon experts' assessment of the threats posed by the Kremlin's satellites.

I have reported on the four types of spy satellites considered most immediately dangerous to the United States. But the Pentagon has assigned a No. 2 priority to other satellites; these, too, are considered a military threat.

The total number of satellites in the top two priorities is close to 40.

According to the Pentagon assessment, U.S. intelligence-gathering satellites are still superior to Moscow's.

Here are the second-priority targets listed in the secret report:

- The Salyut series of military space stations. The report says: "The station possibly can provide near real-time intelligence-targeting data to military forces and can detect missile launches.

Photo-reconnaissance is believed to be its major activity; however, these stations can possibly be modified to do reconnaissance such as electronic intelligence, communications intelligence and command and control."

- High-resolution photographic reconnaissance satellites that drop film in capsules by parachute from low orbit. "The one assessed to be of primary concern," according to the report, "is capable of ejecting recovery capsules, which minimizes the time from when the photographs are taken to when the film is available for analysis.

"Resolution is capable of distinguishing automobiles," the report states.

It adds, "As the Soviet Union projects its forces further from its borders or into a denied area, such as China, it becomes increasingly dependent on this type of [satellite]."

- Navigational satellites. "These satellites, deployed in regularly-spaced three- and six-satellite constellations, provide navigational fixes with an average waiting time of 90 minutes and 45 minutes at the Equator, respectively, for NAVSAT-1 and NAVSAT-2," the report states, adding:

"NAVSAT-1 is accurate to 200 meters, and NAVSAT-2 is possibly accurate within 100 meters. They are primarily used by Soviet naval forces, including ballistic missile submarines."

- Communications satellites. The secret report states: "The Molniya-Raduga types are of primary concern because they are able to provide real-time command and control to naval, land and strategic forces. As Soviet forces operate farther from the Soviet land mass, they become more dependent on these satellites for control of military forces."

Knocking them out, in other words, would leave Soviet field commanders pretty much on their own, which is not the way the Kremlin likes to conduct wars.